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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether people in organizations desired more information related to their jobs or the organization. Specifically, it tested the hypotheses that (1) people who felt they were receiving adequate information would not want more information, and (2) people who felt they were receiving inadequate information would desire more. Subjects, 495 nurses from four different hospitals, were surveyed to determine if they perceived the amount of information they received on a number of topics to be adequate or inadequate and whether they wanted more information on the topics. The resulting data supported the first, but not the second hypothesis. Eleven references are listed. (FL)

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INFORMATION ADEQUACY AND THE DESIRE FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The proposition that people in organizations desire more job/organizationally related information was tested. It was hypothesized that: (1) people who received adequate job/organizationally related information would not desire additional information concerning these topics; (2) people who did not receive adequate job/organizationally related information would desire additional information concerning these topics. Based on a survey of 495 hospital nurses, the first hypothesis was supported. However, the second hypothesis was rejected. It was found that a lack of adequate job/organizationally related information did not result in a person's desire to receive additional information about these topics. This finding is discussed as a gestalt reaction to the hospital's overall communication efforts.

INFORMATION ADEQUACY AND THE DESIRE FOR MORE INFORMATION

One of the best documented findings in the literature of Organizational Communication is that employees at all organizational levels from janitor to president want to be informed about what is going on. The major surveys of employee communication by the I.C.A. (Goldhaber and Rogers, 1979), the D.A.B.O.C./S.I.V.C. (Bateman and Miller, 1981), and the I.A.B.C./T.P.F. & C. (Gildea, 1981) all find that employees want information. This finding is not surprising given the levels of education and sophistication of the American workforce. The communications revolution and the growth of the mass media in the last thirty years have helped us to become sophisticated consumers of information.

There is discrepency in the Organizational Communication literature about how much information employees want. The most commonly accepted view is that despite the potential dangers of overload (Maier, 1964; Farace, Monge, and Russell, 1976) employees want more information. In discussing this proposition O'Reilly and Pondy (1979, p. 144) comment, "There is a substantial tendency for individuals to want more information than they can effectively use." The proposition that people want more information is derived empirically from the finding of Schroder, Driver, and Streufert (1967) that subjects in a tactical game simulation indicated that they preferred to receive "more" or "much more" information in subsequent plays of the game. The proposition is also supported by the research of Oskany (1965) and Chervany and Dickson (1974). The proposition is experientially supported by faculty members who have assigned case studies to their classes only to be told by the students that there isn't enough information in the case to solve it.

The proposition, that people want more information, doesn't make theoretical sense. It seems only reasonable that some people would want more information, while others would not. The principle of saturation (that the person who has enough of something--be it food, money, or information--is not likely to seek more of that something) would suggest that people who have enough information would not want more. The principle of overload (that a person has an upper limit on the amount of information that can be processed, beyond that limit the person cannot handle additional information at all--much less effectively) also suggests that some people who have too much information will not want additional information.

Moreover, the proposition that people want more information is not consistent with the finding of surveys that about 60-70 percent of employees are satisfied with the information they receive from all sources (see Gildea, 1981, p. 4). Why is there a discrepency? We suspect that the answer lies in the research methods used to support the "more information" point of view. All of the studies are controlled laboratory experiments or case study responses. In other words, the proposition is based on the wants of people working in an information poor environment. In actual organizations we would expect that people would want more information when they are dissatisfied with the amount of information they currently receive (as would be the case of students in a case study class or subjects in an experiment), but people would not want more information when they are satisfied with the amount they currently receive (as might be the case in an operating organization). Moreover, since people receive information about many topics they may be satisfied with the amount of information they receive about one topic but dissatisfied with the amount they receive about another topic.

In order to further examine these expectations we framed the following hypotheses:

H1: When people perceive the amount of information they receive about a given topic is adequate, they will not indicate a desire for more information about that topic.

H2: When people perceive the amount of information they receive about a given topic is not adequate, they will indicate a desire for more information about that topic.

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate our hypotheses we asked (as part of a larger study) nurses in four metropolitan hospitals whether the amount of information they received on thirteen (13) topics was adequate and whether they wanted more information on the topics. The thirteen topics were taken from the I.C.A. Communication Audit (Goldhaber and Rogers, 1979). The nurses were asked to indicate their agreement on a five-point scale with statements such as:

"I receive adequate information about how well I am doing my job," and

"I should receive more information about how well I am doing my job." Since these are multiple item scales, the index of reliability selected was the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 which provides the average split-half correlation for all possible ways of dividing a multiple item scale into two parts. In essence, K.R. 20 formula is a measure of homogeneity. The computed KR-20 coefficients for both scales was .885 indicating reliable measurements.

The data were collected from a total of 495 nurses working in four

hospitals. In hospital A (390 beds) 230 questionnaires were distributed and 138 were returned (58%). In hospital B (560 beds) 350 were distributed and 149 (43%) were returned. In hospital C (680 beds) 350 were distributed and 157 (45%) were returned. In hospital D (151 beds) 97 were distributed and 51 (53%) were returned. In general most of the nurses were between 21-35 years old, had worked for their hospital about 3 years, were assigned regularly to specialty or Normal units, and worked either the day or evening shift. (More complete data is available on request.)

In each case a prospectus on the project was approved by the hospital. Prior to distributing the survey, letters of introduction were sent by the Directors of Nursing and a letter of explanation was sent by the researchers. The survey instruments were handed out in the hospital to all full time, regular, float, special duty, and administrative nurses. The surveys were returned to sealed boxes on each floor to minimize tampering. A total of 1035 surveys were distributed and 495 usable responses were returned (47%).

RESULTS

In order to evaluate the hypotheses, we first had to determine which topics the nurses felt they received adequate information and which they felt they did not receive adequate information. Our procedure for accomplishing this was to identify the percentage of nurses responding that they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that <u>they received adequate information</u> on each topic. These percentages along with those who agreed or strongly agreed that <u>they should receive more information</u> on each topic appear in Table 1.

There was an equal division of responses. On six topics a majority felt they received adequate information, on another six a majority felt that they did not receive adequate information. On one topic (how my job relates to the total

operation) there was no clear majority in either direction.

Table 1

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Testing the two hypotheses involved comparing the mean scores of the 495 respondents on two related items. The appropriate statistical test therefore is the t-test for related measures.

The test of each hypothesis was that the observed differences between mean scores would be significantly different and in the predicted direction. This test was applied to each individual information item, to the set of six items where the respondents felt the information was adequate, and to the set of six items where respondents did not feel the information received was adequate.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that when people felt the amount of information is adequate, they will not indicate that they want more information. When people agree with the statement that the amount of information is adequate (low mean score), they will disagree with the statement that they want more information. Thus, the mean scores on information adequacy will be significantly lower than the mean scores on desire for more information. As shown in Table 2 this was exactly the result obtained for each of the six information topics and for the six taken together. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 2

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Hypothesis 2 proposed that when people felt the amount of information they receive on a given topic is not adequate, they will indicate a desire for more information. When they disagree with the statement that the amount of information is adequate (high mean score), they will agree with the statement that they want more information. The mean scores on information adequacy will be significantly higher than the mean scores on desire for more information. As shown in Table 3 we found just the opposite. Mean scores on information adequacy were significantly lower than mean scores on the desire for more information. Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Table 3

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DISCUSSION

We were surprised by these results. The nurses in all four hospitals indicated that they did not want more information even on topics where they did not receive adequate information. The proposition that people in organizations will want more information was refuted more strongly than we expected.

Why is this? One possibility is that this finding is an artifact of this study. Perhaps this finding may be restricted to well-educated, professional women (nurses). Possibly the desire for information questions somehow encouraged disagree responses. These explanations are all possible. However, we think that there is a better explanation.

Our explanation is within the bounds of this study. Remember from Gildea (1981) cited earlier that more than 60% of employees are satisfied with their employers' attempts to communicate with them. Our findings concur. In hospital 1, 58.1% of the nurses were satisfied with their hospital's overall communication efforts. In hospital 2, 65.8% were satisfied. In hospital 3, 64.3% were satisfied. Finally, in hospital 4, 64.7% were satisfied. We suspect that the desire for more information may be an effect of the organization's efforts to keep its employees informed. Thus, in organizations and situations where there is little effort to keep people informed, people would want more information. This would explain the desire for information in the laboratory experiment, in the classroom, and in disaster situations (cf. Flaningam, 1977). Conversely, in organizations and situations where there is much effort to keep people informed, people would perceive that the effort is being made and would not expect additional effort to give them more information (even on topics where they feel they do not receive adequate information). People would recognize and accept that the organization cannot supply them with all of the information they may want. This would explain why nurses in these four hospitals did not feel the need for more information. They felt that the hospitals were already trying to keep them informed. This explanation is also consistent with the experiences of companies like General Electric, American Can, and Westinghouse which have tried to improve their efforts to keep employees informed (BUSINESS WEEK, 1978).

This explanation could be tested by comparing the desire for more information in organizations where employees felt that the employer was making an effort to keep them informed with organizations where the employees felt that the employer was not making the effort. Unfortunately such a test is beyond what we did in the present study. All of our hospitals had active communication

programs. Moreover, this test may be difficult to arrange since one of the realities of studies on Organizational Communication is that they tend to be conducted in organizations where communication is good because the organization is already committed to communication.

TABLE 1

Percent of People Agreeing with each Item

Topic	Receive Adequate Information	Should Receive More Information
New Service or Program Developments	82%	11%
Promotion and Advancement Opportunities	79%	36%
How I am being Judged	69%	31%
How decisions are made that affect my job	69%	16%
How my job related problems are being handled	56%	16%
How well I am doing my job	56%	15%
How my job relates to the total operation	48%	10%
Mistakes and failures of my hospital	37%	15%
How technological changes affect my job	32%	13%
My job duties	32%	10%
Pay and Benefits	30%	3%
Hospital Policies	15%	2%
Problems faced by Management	13%	4%

TABLE 2

Analysis of Differences between Mean Scores
on Items Where Information Received
IS Adequate (N=495)

Topic	Mean Scores Adequate Information	Mean Scores Desire More Information	t	p
How well I am doing my job	2.46	3.57	141.61	<.001
How I am being judged	2.13	2.98	51.01	<.001
How my job related problems are being handled	2.50	3.45	77.71	<.001
Promotion and Advancement Opportunities	1.87	3.05	71.02	<.001
New Service or Program Developments	1.69	4.04	69.82	<.001
How decisions are made that affect my job	2.20	3.61	49.69	<.001
Total	2.13	3.42	144.72	<.001

TABLE 3

Analysis of Differences Between Mean Scores on Items Where Information Received is NOT Adequate (N=495)

Topic	Mean Scores Adequate Information	Mean Scores Desire More Information	t	p
My job duties	3.21	3.73	10.67	<.001
Hospital Policies	3.75	4.12	24.30	<.001
Pay and Benefits	3.26	4.04	39.45	<.001
How technological changes affect my job	3.19	3.66	33.76	<.001
Mistakes and failures of my hospital	3.11	3.59	29.12	<.001
Specific problems faced by management	3.78	4.11	45.62	<.001
Total	3.39	3.84	49.37	<.001

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